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Scientific Aspects of Applying the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Program Aimed at Reducing Stress and Depressive Symptoms Among Young People in Kazakhstan: A Narrative Review

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Abstract. This article presents a narrative review of contemporary scientific studies published between 2015 and 2025, focusing on the analysis of the effects of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program on stress and depressive symptoms among young people.

The review synthesizes findings from national and international meta-analyses, as well as randomized controlled trials. The analysis of the available evidence indicates that the MBSR program contributes to a statistically significant reduction in stress levels, with this effect being associated with enhanced emotional regulation and attentional control processes.

With regard to depressive symptoms, the effects of MBSR are generally small to moderate and depend on the duration of the intervention, the degree of participant engagement, as well as the study design and contextual factors. In addition, evidence from studies examining online and blended formats of MBSR suggests promising opportunities for increasing the accessibility of this intervention for young populations. The results of the narrative analysis highlight a scientifically grounded potential for adapting the MBSR program to the cultural and educational context of young people in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), mindfulness, awareness, stress, depression, emotion regulation, youth.

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Introduction

In recent years, psycho-emotional burdens among young people in Kazakhstan have increased markedly. Academic and occupational stress, socio-economic uncertainty, as well as the impact of chronic stressors pose significant risks to the mental health of young people. Findings from the international Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC, 2022) study conducted in the Republic of Kazakhstan indicate that 16.6% of adolescents aged 11–15 exhibit low levels of mental well-being and depressive symptoms, with this proportion increasing to 21.8% by the age of 15 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

Furthermore, studies conducted among university students in Kazakhstan have reported a prevalence of emotional exhaustion (burnout syndrome) ranging from 28% to 31%, thereby confirming the role of academic workload as a chronic stress factor (Sarsembayeva et al., 2019; Salari et al., 2020). In addition, the UNICEF Situation Analysis (SitAn) for Kazakhstan indicates that in 2022, 35 cases of suicide were recorded among adolescents aged 15–17, underscoring the critical importance of preventive mental health interventions (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023; UNICEF Kazakhstan, 2023).

Taken together, these findings substantiate the need to implement accessible and evidence-based preventive approaches for young people in Kazakhstan that can be applied within universities, youth centers, and psychological support services. Accordingly, the objective of the present study is to provide a narrative review of the effects of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program on stress and depressive symptoms among young people, grounded in established psychological theories.

The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program is a structured intervention grounded in mindfulness practices and traditionally includes meditation, body scanning, and mindful movement. These practices contribute to stress reduction, improvement in emotion regulation, and the development of individuals' abilities to recognize and manage their emotional experiences.

The MBSR program was developed in the 1970s by Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn and aims to reduce stress responses by helping individuals cultivate greater awareness of their internal experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Meibert, 2011).

Empirical evidence indicates that MBSR practices are effective in reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, as well as in improving emotional reactivity and emotion regulation (Khoury et al., 2015; Goldin et al., 2010).

This review provides a scientifically grounded basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the MBSR program in reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among young people. Moreover, the findings contribute theoretically to the development and cultural adaptation of mental health promotion programs within the context of Kazakhstan.

Materials and methods of the study. This section examines key studies on the application of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) approach in addressing stress and depression. Both Kazakhstani and international scientific literature were systematically reviewed, focusing on studies that evaluated the effectiveness of MBSR programs among students, employees, and other social groups. The methodological foundations of MBSR interventions were analyzed, with particular emphasis placed on meta-analyses and systematic reviews that provide robust empirical evidence of their effectiveness.

In particular, the meta-analysis conducted by de Vibe M., Bjorndal A., Fattah S., Dyrdal G.M., Halland E., and Tanner-Smith E. demonstrates that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs lead to statistically significant reductions in perceived stress levels and substantial improvements in overall indicators of psychological well-being (de Vibe et al., 2017).

The meta-analysis conducted by Khoury B., Sharma M., Rush S.E., and Fournier C. included 29 empirical studies aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs. The findings demonstrated that MBSR interventions lead to significant reductions in perceived stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. The authors further emphasize that the effectiveness of the program is consistently observed not only in clinical populations but also in non-clinical (healthy) samples, supporting the consideration of MBSR as a scientifically grounded preventive intervention for psychological distress (Khoury et al., 2015).

According to contemporary developments in emotion regulation theory presented in the works of Gross J.J. and Aldao A., stress levels are closely associated with an individual's capacity to effectively manage emotional responses (Gross, 2015; Aldao et al., 2016).

In the studies conducted by **Gu J., Strauss C., Bond R., and Cavanagh K., as well as Hölzel B.K., Lazar, S.W., Gard T., Schuman-Olivier Z., Vago D.R., and Ott U.**, it was demonstrated that **MBSR practices reduce emotional reactivity by fostering a non-judgmental acceptance of emotional experiences rather than emotional suppression**, thereby contributing substantially to reductions in stress levels. Furthermore, enhanced attentional control achieved through mindfulness practices was shown to be associated with more efficient functioning of cognitive control networks and improved capacity for emotion regulation (Gu et al., 2015; Hölzel et al., 2016).

In addition, contemporary theoretical and empirical research on rumination indicates that the persistence of depressive symptoms is closely linked to repetitive negative thinking processes, as emphasized by Watkins E.R. (Watkins E.R., 2016).

The study by Mambetalina A., Cyniak-Cieciura M., Popiel A., Zawadzki B., Cremeans-Smith J.K. and Fruehstorfer D. (2025) examined the measurement invariance of the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5) across samples characterized by diverse trauma experiences. The findings demonstrate that the PCL-5 enables valid cross-cultural and cross-national comparisons of PTSD symptom severity, thereby supporting its application in international research contexts. **Although Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)** is not considered a first-line intervention for PTSD, existing evidence indicates that it may exert beneficial secondary effects through improvements in stress regulation, reductions in ruminative processing, and enhanced affect regulation. Consequently, the cross-cultural psychometric robustness of the PCL-5 is of particular importance when assessing the indirect effects of MBSR on PTSD-related symptomatology.

Within this conceptual framework, **Bernstein A., Hadash Y., Lichtash Y., Tanay G., Shepherd K., and Fresco D.M.** (2019) demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions, including MBSR, facilitate the development of decentering, defined as a metacognitive capacity to perceive thoughts as transient mental events rather than accurate representations of the self or external reality. This shift in cognitive perspective contributes to the attenuation of ruminative thinking patterns and the disruption of maladaptive cognitive cycles.

In addition, a systematic review of contemporary experimental studies conducted by **Mambetalina A.S., Gitikhmaeva L.M., Aubakirova Zh.K., Abishev Zh., and Karagulakova S. V.** (2025) provides convergent evidence for the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms across heterogeneous international samples, further supporting the transdiagnostic and cross-cultural applicability of mindfulness-based approaches.

In the scholarly works of **Tang Y.Y., Hölzel B.K., and Posner M.I., as well as Malinowski P.,** contemporary neurocognitive models of **attentional control theory** demonstrate that mindfulness practices strengthen cognitive control mechanisms and contribute to reductions in both the physiological and affective components of the stress response (Tang et al. 2015; Hölzel et al. 2011; Malinowski 2018).

Results and Discussion

Based on the scientific evidence reviewed above, the present study proposes a conceptual model for the application of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program in addressing stress and depressive symptoms among young people.

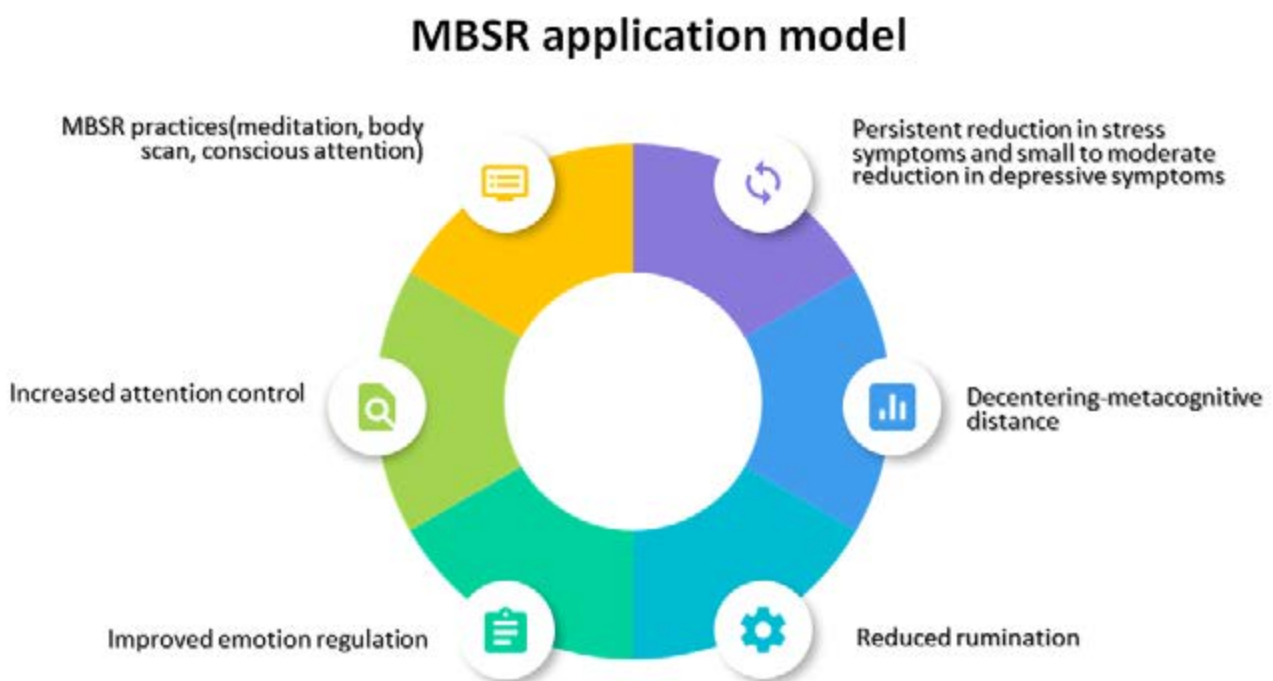


Figure 1. Model of the Application of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Kazakhstani and international empirical studies and meta-analyses consistently confirm the effectiveness of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program in reducing stress-related indicators (Baer Khoury et al. 2015; Yiming Pan et al. 2024; James Galante et al. 2018). In particular, a statistically significant reduction in perceived stress levels among young people has been documented, which is explained by the direct influence of MBSR on mechanisms of emotion regulation and attentional control.

With regard to depressive symptoms, the observed effects are most often characterized as

small to moderate and appear to depend on the consistency of participation, the duration of the program, and the format of intervention delivery (Andrew Dawson et al. 2020; Büşra Pençe et al. 2024). These findings are associated with the relative stability of the cognitive and ruminative components of depression, as well as their lower sensitivity to short-term interventions.

In the works of Shakimova D.D., Lawrence K.C., and Aubakirova Z.K. (2024), a quasi-experimental design was employed to demonstrate that teachers' professional development and resilience training (TPD-R) can effectively enhance stress resilience. The findings indicate that when professional development programs systematically incorporate skills such as emotion regulation, cognitive reappraisal, and the activation of social support, stress levels decrease significantly. Additionally, differences were observed across gender and length of professional experience, with stronger effects identified among female teachers.

To achieve a comprehensive assessment of psychological functioning, the study employed validated psychological and physiological diagnostic instruments. Psychological measures included the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to assess perceived stress, the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) to evaluate general anxiety symptoms, and emotional intelligence assessments (MSCEIT) designed to measure abilities related to emotion perception, understanding, and regulation. Recent research has demonstrated the high psychometric reliability and cross-cultural applicability of these instruments in youth and student populations (Lee et al. 2015; Löwe et al. 2019; Keefer et al. 2018).

To complement psychological indicators with objective data, physiological assessment methods were employed. In particular, biofeedback technologies enable the assessment of autonomic nervous system functioning, including heart rate variability and galvanic skin response, and have been widely used to register physiological markers of stress and emotion regulation processes (Lehrer & Gevirtz, 2014; Goessl et al., 2017).

In addition, electroencephalography (EEG) was used to record brain activity, allowing for the assessment of neurophysiological changes associated with attentional stability, emotion regulation, and relaxation states. Neuropsychological studies conducted since 2015 indicate that mindfulness-based interventions are associated with alterations in frontal activity as well as in the theta and alpha frequency bands, which have been linked to the strengthening of self-regulation mechanisms (Tang et al. 2015; Cahn et al. 2019; Brandmeyer & Delorme 2021).

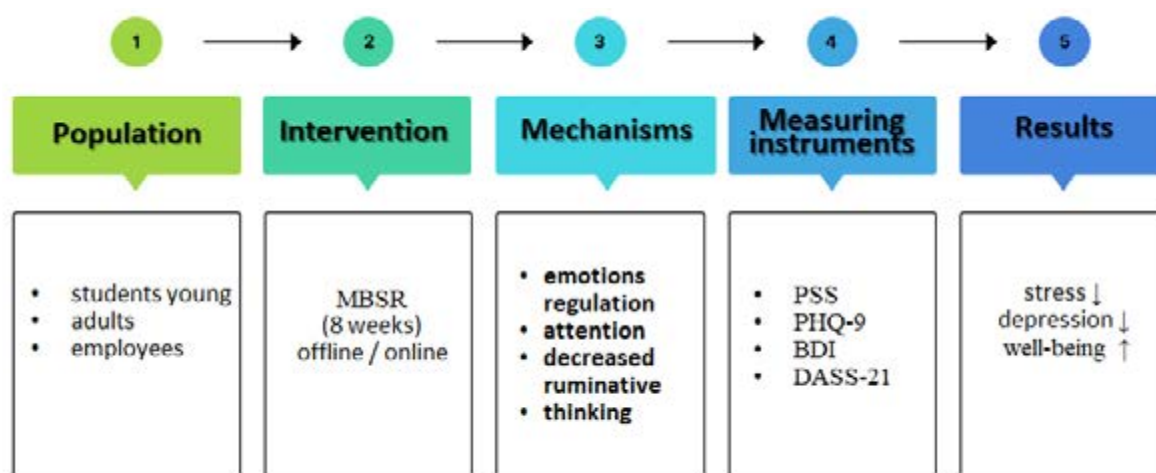


Figure 2. Contemporary Analytical Framework of MBSR Effectiveness (2015–2025)

Conclusion

Thus, a narrative review of contemporary scientific evidence on the effects of applying Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) among young people in Kazakhstan on stress and depressive symptoms has been conducted.

1. The theoretical foundations of the MBSR program were analyzed. The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program is grounded in the deliberate orientation of attention toward present-moment experience. The program incorporates meditation practices, breathing exercises, and techniques aimed at cultivating mindful bodily awareness.

2. Scientific evidence on the effectiveness of MBSR among young people was reviewed. Kazakhstani and international empirical studies and meta-analyses indicate that the MBSR program contributes to reductions in perceived stress levels, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among young people.

3. Prospects for the implementation of MBSR among young people in Kazakhstan were identified. Within the Kazakhstani context, the implementation of MBSR programs in schools, higher education institutions, and youth resource centers is considered a promising and effective approach to strengthening mental health.

Thus, a narrative review of contemporary scientific evidence on the effects of applying Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) among young people on stress and depressive symptoms was conducted. The review addressed the strengths and limitations of methodological approaches, including sample adequacy, duration of interventions, and the validity and appropriateness of assessment instruments used to measure stress and depression (questionnaires, rating scales, and clinical assessments).

The findings indicate that the MBSR program demonstrates a stable and consistent effect in reducing stress-related symptoms, which is associated with the enhancement of mindfulness and emotion regulation mechanisms. In contrast, the impact on depressive symptoms appears to be largely indirect and dependent on factors such as the level of ruminative thinking, the duration of the intervention, and individual differences among participants.

Key trends identified across studies include a progressive reduction in stress levels and depressive symptoms among participants engaged in MBSR programs. However, several limitations were also noted, including the subjective nature of self-report measures, heterogeneity of samples, and a lack of long-term follow-up data. Additionally, the review examined the potential mechanisms underlying MBSR effects, highlighting the role of mindfulness skill development, enhanced emotion regulation capacity, and reductions in ruminative thinking in promoting psychological well-being.

The conducted literature review confirms that the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program is effective in reducing stress and depressive symptoms. Future research should strengthen methodological rigor by incorporating long-term follow-up designs and objective assessment methods.

Overall, the narrative review establishes MBSR as an effective, theory-driven psychological intervention for reducing stress and depressive symptoms among young people. Further studies are warranted to develop culturally adapted programs and to evaluate their effectiveness through empirical research.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has been identified as a scientifically grounded

and practically significant approach for the prevention and alleviation of stress and depression. Further research is required to enhance program effectiveness, adapt its content and delivery formats to specific target groups, and expand its scope of application. The future development of this field is closely linked to the integration of MBSR into psychological support systems, as well as to more in-depth investigations of its underlying mechanisms of action.

Author Contributions

Zh.K. Aubakirova – conceptualization of the study, development of the methodological design, scientific supervision, and critical revision of the manuscript.

L.O. Agazhaeva – literature review and analysis, preparation of the theoretical framework, and contribution to manuscript writing.

S.V. Karagulakova – preparation of the theoretical framework, manuscript formatting in accordance with journal requirements, and preparation of the final version of the paper.

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Қазақстан жастары арасында стресс пен депрессиялық симптомдарды төмендетуге бағытталған Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) бағдарламасын қолданудың ғылыми аспектілері: нарративті шолу

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада 2015–2025 жылдар аралығында жарияланған заманауи ғылыми еңбектерге сүйене отырып, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) бағдарламасының жастар арасындағы стресс пен депрессиялық симптомдарға ықпалына нарративті шолу жүргізілді.

Зерттеу барысында қазақстандық және халықаралық мета-талдаулар мен рандомизацияланған бақыланатын зерттеулердің нәтижелері жүйеленді. Алынған деректер MBSR бағдарламасының стресс деңгейін төмендетуде оң әсер көрсететінін және бұл әсер эмоцияны реттеу мен зейінді бақылау механизмдерінің күшеюімен байланысты екенін көрсетеді.

Депрессиялық симптомдарға қатысты әсер көбіне шағын немесе орташа деңгейде байқалады және ол интервенцияның ұзақтығына, қатысушылардың белсенділігіне, сондай-ақ зерттеу контекстіне тәуелді екені анықталды. Сонымен қатар, онлайн және гибриді форматтардың тиімділігі туралы деректер MBSR бағдарламасының қолжетімділігін арттыру мүмкіндігін көрсетеді. Жүргізілген нарративті талдау MBSR бағдарламасын Қазақстан жастарының мәдени және білім беру контекстіне бейімдеп қолданудың ғылыми негізделген мүмкіндіктері бар екенін көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), майндфулнесс, саналық, стресс, депрессия, эмоцияларды реттеу, жастар.

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Научные аспекты применения программы Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), направленной на снижение стрессовых и депрессивных симптомов среди молодежи Казахстана: нарративный обзор

Аннотация. В статье представлен нарративный обзор современных научных исследований, опубликованных в период 2015–2025 годов, посвященных анализу влияния программы Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) на стресс и депрессивные симптомы у молодежи.

В ходе исследования были обобщены результаты отечественных и зарубежных мета-анализов, а также рандомизированных контролируемых исследований. Анализ полученных данных показывает, что программа MBSR способствует достоверному снижению уровня стресса,

при этом выявленный эффект обусловлен усилением процессов эмоциональной регуляции и управления вниманием.

Эффект MBSR в отношении депрессивных симптомов в большинстве исследований носит ограниченный или умеренно выраженный характер и обусловлен продолжительностью программы, уровнем вовлечённости участников, а также условиями и дизайном исследования. Наряду с этим данные, полученные в исследованиях онлайн и смешанных форматов реализации MBSR, свидетельствуют о перспективах повышения доступности данной интервенции для молодежи. Результаты нарративного анализа указывают на наличие научно обоснованного потенциала адаптации программы MBSR к культурному и образовательному контексту молодежи Казахстана.

Ключевые слова: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), майндфулнесс, осознанность, стресс, депрессия, эмоциональная регуляция, молодежь.

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